

**Good afternoon, esteemed members of the Maryland State Legislature,**

I am Dr. Lois Rosado and this is my colleague, Dr. Denise Nadasen, we represent the Greenbelt Reparations Commission that was established in a referendum voted by the citizens of Greenbelt in 2021. This testimony is in support of House Bill 1422 and Senate Bill 0587 to establish a Maryland State Reparations Commission or Task Force to rectify harms done to Black American Marylanders during and after enslavement. The time has come for the State of Maryland acknowledge and address the deep trauma and lasting injustices caused by past laws, policies and practices. This is not just about the past; it is about the present and the future of Maryland.

**Historical Injustice in Maryland** was produced through the Transatlantic Era of African Enslavement that made Maryland a slave state. In 1664 the Maryland Assembly codifies a race-based law providing that enslaved people of African descent are to be held in slavery for life and that persons born to enslaved African-descent mothers will also be held in slavery for life. For centuries, plantation owners enslaved African people and built the economy of this state from their labor without compensation. In 1695 the Maryland Assembly passes the “Act Restraining the frequent Assembling of Negroes within this Province” because they feared the enslaved Africans were plotting uprisings to escape bondage. Even after Emancipation in 1864, Black Marylanders continued to face Jim Crow laws that fostered, segregation, voter suppression, housing discrimination, and exclusion from economic opportunities. The State and local government apparatus helped to foster the impression that Black American Marylanders were criminals, lazy, and inferior. These psychological and traumatic injustices were not accidental—they were the result of deliberate policies that suppressed Black American advancement and created long-lasting disparities.

**The Racial Wealth Gap and Economic Disparities:** The consequences of past injustices are evident today. Black American Marylanders, on average, have significantly less wealth than White Marylanders due to discriminatory policies like redlining, unequal access to education or health care, and exclusion from economic programs that benefited others and have prevented generations of Black American families from accumulating wealth.

**Precedents for Reparations** are not a new or radical idea.

- Belinda Sutton sued the Royals of Boston for pension and compensation in 1783.
- Callie House and Isiah Dickerson established the Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association to gain pensions/reparations for formerly enslaved people.
- The United States government compensated Japanese Americans interned during World War II, as well as settlements for victims of racial discrimination.
- There are over 70 local reparations commissions across the country: Cities like Evanston, Illinois, Berkeley, California, and Providence, Rhode Island have begun to take steps toward reparations for Black American residents.

Maryland now has an opportunity to publicly recognize its moral and historical responsibility.

**Moral and Legal Responsibility:** Reparations are not just about financial compensation; they may include memorialization, restitution, rehabilitation, an apology and guarantee non-repetition of the harms that were done. Addressing these historical wrongs is not just the right thing to do—it is essential for building a stronger and more equitable Maryland.

**Conclusion:** The legacy of slavery and systemic racism has left an undeniable mark on the state and residents of Maryland. We cannot undo the past, but we can and must take action to address its lasting impacts. By creating the Maryland Reparations Commission/Task Force, we have a chance to move toward justice, ensuring that all residents share equally in the prosperity of this state. We urge you to support the bill to establish a state Reparations Commission/Task Force and take a step towards acknowledging and making amends for historical harms. Thank you for your time and consideration.